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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 002014

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/PMBS, EAP/BCLTV, EAP/RSP

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TAGS: PREL BM RP ASEAN

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES EXPECT BURMA TO RELINQUISH ASEAN CHAIR

REF: MANILA 1737

Classified By: Pol/C Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In meeting with Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo on May 2, Ambassador urged the GRP -- and Romulo, personally -- to continue to work within ASEAN to push Burma toward democratic change and release of Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as other key roadmap goals, as Romulo had done at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' retreat in Cebu (reftel). Romulo noted that, for the Philippines in particular, the issue was far greater than whether Burma would or would not relinquish the chairmanship of ASEAN after Malaysia, but instead how best to ensure that Burma stuck to a real timeline for the roadmap, including permission for the UN Secretary General's special envoy to visit soon. He said he was content to let other Foreign Ministers agitate about the chairmanship issue itself, in part due to concern that others would see the GRP as trying to grab the chairmanship for itself (as next in alphabetical order). He noted Philippine Congressional and Senate resolutions against Burma's chairmanship as well as strong editorial comment in the Philippine media, and indicated that he had shared these views with his ASEAN counterparts. He indicated that he believed that Burma would, in the end, decide to relinquish the chair. Separately, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for Policy Sonia Brady (a former Ambassador to Burma and Thailand) noted that the GRP was ready to assume the chairmanship in 2007, as needed. She added that there was no consideration of Malaysia extending its chairmanship for a second year, but pointed to the precedent of sorts of Vietnam, which early in its ASEAN membership had deferred its turn as chairman.

¶2. (C) Ambassador underscored that major USG goals worldwide were the spread of freedom and the expansion of the circle of democracies, and expressed appreciation for what the GRP was doing in this regard already. Romulo noted that the ASEM Foreign Ministers' meeting in Japan May 6-7 would provide another opportunity for discussion on Burma, which would also be sending a representative.

¶3. (C) Comment: Department may wish to provide Embassies in ASEM member capitals an update on US views on Burma in advance of this meeting to share with their counterparts.

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